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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 002160

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR DICARLO, EUR/SCE; NSC FOR BRAUN; OSD FOR FLORY

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: POLITICIANS PLEDGE TO RESTRUCTURE THE STATE

REF: SARAJEVO 2140

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶11. (C) SUMMARY: As the election campaign reached the halfway mark this week, comments on constitutional reform by Bosnian politicians are featuring prominently in the press.

Representatives of the Patriotic Block coalition, who helped defeat the April constitutional reform package met with HighRep Schwarz-Schilling on September 13. In public comments following the meeting, the party representatives claimed the HighRep promised that OHR would play the key role in revisiting the constitutional reform package. Meanwhile, Party of BiH (SBiH) President Haris Silajdzic visited Banja Luka and told a press conference he was justified in his call for the abolition of the Republika Srpska (RS). Silajdzic said his vision for the future of Bosnia is a country organized into economic zones with a new constitution created through "open, democratic debate." Separately, the RS announced plans to sign an agreement with Serbia on "special ties" on September 26. Although the agreement is based on one signed in 2001 with Serbia and Montenegro, the timing is provocative and has contributed to popular speculation that the agreement is another sign of RS secession plans. END SUMMARY.

Patriotic Block Leaders Meet HighRep, Discuss Constitution

¶12. (SBU) Social Democratic Union (SDU) President Sejfudin Tokic and Bosnian Party (BOSS) President (and Patriotic Block presidential candidate) Mirnes Ajanovic met September 13 with High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling in Sarajevo. Following the meeting, Tokic and Ajanovic gave a lengthy interview to Dnevni Avaz newspaper during which Tokic claimed Schwarz-Schilling promised that OHR would play a key role in coordinating the preparations for the passage of a new constitution. According to Tokic, Schwarz-Schilling also said that all the principles of the European Charter for Human Rights would be enshrined in a new constitution, that negotiations should be completed in 2007, and should address "government structures at all levels."

Silajdzic's Vision for Future of BiH

¶13. (SBU) Party for BiH (SBiH) President and Bosniak Tri-Presidency Candidate Haris Silajdzic visited Banja Luka September 13 for meetings with local members of his party.

During a press conference after the meetings, Silajdzic, who rarely visits the Republika Srpska (RS), cited the "ethnic purity" of the RS as the justification for his repeated calls to abolish the entity. Silajdzic claimed his position does not contravene Dayton because the RS has failed to live up to its obligations under the Accord to allow the returns of displaced persons. Silajdzic said that his party's goal is a Bosnia organized into economic regions, though he provided no details on their nature or composition. He also called for a new constitution created through open and democratic debate among Bosnians citizens and constitutional experts, rather than "a closed circle of non-experts."

RS and Serbia to Sign Agreement on "Special Ties"

¶4. (SBU) During a September 13 visit to Belgrade, RS President Dragan Cacic, in a joint statement with Serbian President Boris Tadic, announced the finalization of a draft bilateral agreement establishing "special ties" between the RS and Serbia. The agreement will be formally signed during a September 26 ceremony in Banja Luka. The leaders noted that the draft will update an existing agreement, signed in 2001, to reflect the fact that Serbia is now an independent state following the secession referendum in Montenegro in May. Such agreements are permitted under Dayton, but the timing of the announcement, two weeks before Bosnian national elections and amid ongoing calls for an independence referendum in the RS, has contributed to speculation that this may be another step in the RS distancing itself from Sarajevo and state institutions.

Comment

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¶5. (C) The three episodes illustrate how the structure of the Bosnian state is dominating election-related discourse. They also underscore how parties are trying to exploit nationalist sentiment as a means of winning votes. The Patriotic Block interview and Silajdzic press conference also suggest that Schwarz-Schilling simply refuses to heed warnings from Washington and the Embassy about the dangers associated with engaging Bosnian politicians now about phase II of constitutional reform. From their comments to Dnevni Avaz, it is clear that he briefed Patriotic Block leaders on his plans for constitutional reform earlier on the same day he pledged to the Ambassador that he would discuss this issue only outside Bosnia and among his informal advisory group (reftel). Silajdzic's comments about the process for negotiating a new constitutional arrangement also bear an eerie resemblance to the plans Schwarz-Schilling outlined to the Ambassador. End Comment.

MCELHANEY